MARTIN DENNY
FORBIDDEN ISLAND

After recording Exotica II in 1957 we continued on our first tour of the mainland playing several resorts, finally returning to Las Vegas for our last engagement at the Flamingo. We played behind the bar on a revolving stage in the casino lounge. When people would sit down to listen to us the stage would be moving so that by the time we made a full circle there were brand new faces sitting at the bar. If that wasn't enough, the pit bosses kept sending us messages "Knock off the bird calls!" They felt it was distracting the gamblers. Knock off the bird calls! - that was our whole gimmick!

By the end of our dates at the Flamingo we didn't have another booking. My first album hadn't really broken at this point and I was beginning to wonder if I had made the right decision leaving Henry J. Kaiser's Hawaiian Village where at least we would have had a guaranteed booking. In desperation I sent a cable to Don the Beachcomber in Hawaii telling him that we were available, asking if he could use us. To my relief, he cabled back saying "You can start as soon as you get over here." It was a lifesaver.

It was with great misgiving that I went back to Hawaii as my wife, June, was expecting our baby at any moment and couldn't travel. But I had to make a living and it was important that I keep the group together. On August 6, 1957 June gave birth to our daughter, Christina Gwen, at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in Los Angeles. It wasn't until three weeks later when June was well enough to travel back to Hawaii that I finally got to see my daughter.

Not long after we got back to Don the Beachcomber's, my vibist, Arthur Lyman, informed me that he was leaving to form his own group. Unbeknownst to me Henry J. Kaiser had been working to make good on his threat to break up my band after I had declined to renew my contract with him. Kaiser's goal was to do whatever it took to duplicate my sound and stage presentation that had been so successful for him at his Hawaiian Village hotel complex. He had spoken to Arthur about coming back to the Shell Bar to front his own group. So before he had given me his notice, Arthur was secretly rehearsing with his own band. I found out about this later through a friend of mine who resembled me. You can imagine their stunned surprise when in the middle of their rehearsal in walked my friend!

When Arthur left, he took with him with my former bass player, John Kramer, and Harold Chang, a drummer who had recorded with me on my first album, Exotica. Kaiser thought that he had beaten me by putting Arthur in the the Shell Bar, the very same room I had played, with a similar format to mine, and almost breaking up my band. But it didn't work out that way. He didn't break my spirit. Augie Colon remained loyal. Now it was up to me to rebuild the group.

I first enlisted Harvey Ragsdale, a local bass player from Hilo, on the big island, who at the time was playing with the famous calypso singer Stan Wilson. He worked out beautifully.

I then made a trip to Los Angeles to find a vibe player, calling on a very well known marimba teacher who gave me names of possible candidates. One of them I telephoned was Julius Wechter. At that time Julius was in his early 20's, working as a timekeeper for Lockheed, but music was his first love. When I heard that he was using a rather inferior set of vibes, I was kind of surprised. If he was that good on marimba I would have thought he'd have had a better set. I thanked him for his time and continued to interview several other musicians and even auditioned somebody else before going back to Hawaii. Upon returning I got a letter from Julius. In it he wrote that he was getting a new instrument and that if I hired him he would be a great asset to me and that I would never regret it. That letter really touched me and so I hired him. I saved that letter and presented it to Julius many years later. He kept his word, turning out to be the most prolific and talented musicians that I ever had in the group.

Around this time I was appearing at Don the Beachcomber's in Waikiki, when my friend Charles Griffith, who had written lyrics to some of the songs I had composed, was getting ready to produce and direct the film Forbidden Island at Trader Vic's. The film starred Jon Hall who played a scuba diver trying to find a sunken treasure before a gang of crooks did. Charles asked me to play a cameo part of a piano player in a bar, like Sam the piano player in Casablanca. He also let me use the title of Forbidden Island for what became my third album for Liberty Records.

In 1960 someone came along with the bright idea that Forbidden Island would sell more albums if it had a little more sexual allure to it. So they shot a new cover with a model who provided a provocative, suggestive look with a tantilizing pose of a cherry between her lips. - *MARTIN DENNY*

FORBIDDEN ISLAND

Recorded at Roosevelt High School Auditorium, Honolulu 1958
Engineers: Ted Keep and Bob Lang / Producer: Simon Waronker / Recorded in stereo

SESSION LINE-UP:
Martin Denny: piano, arranger / Julius Wechter: vibes, marimba, percussion
Harvey Ragsdale: string bass / Augie Colon: bongos, congas, Latin rhythms, bird calls

GUEST ARTISTS:
Lew Paino: drums, percussion / Will Brady: flute, musette / Bud Lee: guitar, Japanese samisen
Mike Garcia: congas, Latin effects

ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTS:
conch shell, Buddhist Prayer Bowls, Javanese 1 1/2 octave toy xylophone, glass chimes, bamboo chimes, assorted gongs, celeste, clusters of ankle zills, ipo (Hawaiian gourd)

COBRA - I first introduced my composition, "Cobra", while I was appearing at the Shell bar at the Hawaiian Village in 1956. An airline hostess had presented me with an Indian snake charmer's flute and my bass player at the time, John Kramer, soon learned how to play it. We had a lot of fun with this song. I bought a wicker container as well as a phony snake that had springs in. I then attached a nylon thread from the snake's head, which led up to an eyelet in the ceiling and ran down to where I sat at the piano. When the basket was opened the snake would pop out and then by pulling the thread I would make the snake undulate while Augie, wearing a turban, pretended to be the snake charmer as John played the snake charmer's flute. The audience would howl in delight! When we recorded this in the studio, Will Brady reproduced the sound of the snake charmer's flute with a musette while Augie supplied the snake hisses.

PORT AU PRINCE - This was a head arrangement of a 12 measure theme we kept transposing. On it Augie plays a military cadence and blows a whistle at the start of each cadence while Julius swings on vibes. Film actress Alice Faye, who was a fan of ours, loved this arrangement which has a good deal of humor to it.

EXOTICA - This composition of mine captures the essence of the exotic. It features just the four man group line-up.

LITTLE CHINA DOLL - An interesting oriental music box effect.

BALI HAI - Here is the famous theme inspired from James A. Michener's South Pacific. Michener was a fan of mine who would frequent the Dagger Bar at Don the Beachcomber's to hear us play. He would later write the liner notes for my fifth album, Hypnotique.

NARCISSUS QUEEN - This composition was written by Alex Anderson, a prolific Hawaiian composer who lived to be nearly 101 years old. Alex was both a dear friend of mine and an inspiration to me.

GOONY BIRDS - Julius Wechter composed and arranged this song, capturing the droll antics of these birds found on Midway Island. Augie did all the bird calls.

SIMSIM - Recorded with the four man group, this arrangement has a distinct Latin flavor to it.

PRIMITIVA - This composition of mine sets the stage for my fourth album, of the same title.

MARCH OF THE SIAMESE CHILDREN - Taken from the musical The King And I, the child-like theme begins on a 1 1/2 octave Javanese toy xylophone mounted on Julius' vibes. It's accompanied by a snare drum and small hand cymbals played by Augie. After the theme's intro, Julius removes the toy xylophone and uses the vibes while I play the celeste.

SUKARA - Named after an old Japanese cherry blossom, this arrangement features the three stringed samisen played by Bud Lee.

FORBIDDEN ISLAND - I composed "Forbidden Island" with a twelve tone introduction and ending which adds to its mysterious and foreboding sound.